Looking West

A Survey of Western Canadians

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Canada West Foundation Director of Research

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PREFACE

In 2001, the Canada West Foundation published Building the New West: A Framework for Regional Prosperity, outlining five key priorities for ensuring long-term prosperity in western Canada. These five priorities are:

- The West must create the tools to attract, retain and build human capital;
- The West must continue economic diversification;
- The West must strengthen its transportation infrastructure;
- The West must promote the global competitiveness of its major cities; and
- The West must develop new ways of facilitating regional coordination.

Since 2001, Canada West has conducted research in each of these five priority areas. The Looking West 2003 survey is intended to tap into the views and opinions of western Canadians on a number of issues relating to these five priority areas, as well as to probe attitudes toward other key policy topics, such as the environment and health care reform. The purpose of the Looking West 2003 survey is to inform the public, business and community leaders, and elected officials and public servants at all three levels of government about the views and perspectives of western Canadians.

Looking West 2003: A Survey of Western Canadians provides an overview of the survey results, noting key provincial, demographic and partisan variations. The report concludes by considering some of the main questions raised about western Canada, dispelling some common myths and recognizing important realities. It is hoped that the survey findings will be informative to Canadians and their governments in ongoing discussions about the future of western Canada.

METHODOLOGY

The Looking West 2003 survey is based on a random sample telephone survey of western Canadians 18 years of age or older. On behalf of the Canada West Foundation, Western Opinion Research administered the survey between January 22 and February 18, 2003 out of their Winnipeg, Manitoba call centre.

To allow for statistically significant analyses of each western province, as well as the West as a whole, a relatively large sample was used for each province. A total of 3,202 residents were interviewed by telephone across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The provincial breakdown is as follows:

Province	Total N	Margin of Error +/- 95 times out of 100
British Columbia	802	3.46%
Alberta	800	3.46%
Saskatchewan	800	3.46%
Manitoba	800	3.46%
Western Canada	3,202	1.73%

In the presentation of aggregate regional data, a weighting adjustment factor was applied to match each province's sample weight to its portion of the regional population 18 years of age and over. Percentages presented represent the percentage of the total sample including non-respondents ("don't know/refused"); comparative Looking West 2001 survey data have been adjusted accordingly to ensure accurate comparisons. Because non-responses are not reported in the tables or text, the displayed figures will not always add up to 100%.

The survey analysis includes urban-rural breakdowns. For this analysis, four categories are used: census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of 100,000 and more; medium sized cities of 10,000 - 99,999; small towns; and rural areas. The division of respondents into these categories was based on respondent self-identification. The analysis also includes federal political partisanship, as measured by respondent self-identification of voting behavior in the 2000 federal election.

Some survey questions replicate questions asked in the Looking West 2001 survey. For a complete overview of that survey, please see Loleen Berdahl, Looking West: A Survey of Western Canadians (Calgary: Canada West Foundation, 2001).

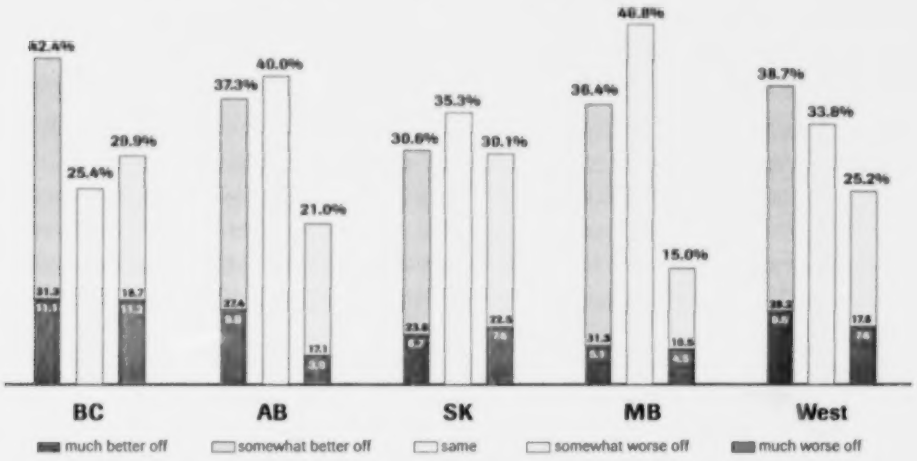
PROVINCIAL PERCEPTIONS: 2001 AND 2003

To what extent do western Canadians feel optimistic about their province's economic and social outlook? Are western Canadians becoming more or less optimistic about their province's future? Respondents were asked: "Overall, five years from now, do you expect that [province] will be: much better off than now; somewhat better off than now; about the same as now; somewhat worse off than now; much worse off than now?" This is a question that was replicated from the Looking West 2001 survey, and as in 2001, the provincial variations are illuminating.

Western Canadians generally optimistic about provincial futures

Almost four in ten western Canadians anticipate that their province will be better off five years from now. British Columbia respondents are most optimistic, and Saskatchewan respondents are the most pessimistic (although British Columbia respondents are almost as likely as Saskatchewan respondents to state their province would be worse off in five years). Manitoba respondents are clearly the least pessimistic. There are a number of interesting variations with respect to provincial perceptions: gender (men are more optimistic than women); partisanship (NDP voters are more likely to say their province will be worse off); education (respondents with a high school diploma or less are less optimistic); and income (in general, as income increases, optimism increases).

Figure 1: **Provincial expectations in five years**



Optimism rising in Saskatchewan, falling in Alberta

Comparing the results of the Looking West 2001 and Looking West 2003 surveys, it is clear that provincial optimism is changing in the region. While the aggregate regional numbers are relatively similar, a number of important trends can be seen. The first is that British Columbia and Manitoba respondents are becoming slightly more optimistic about their province's immediate future. The second is rising optimism in Saskatchewan, with an almost 10 percentage point jump between 2001 and 2003. But the most interesting trend is in Alberta, where provincial optimism dropped over 25 percentage points in the two-year period, leaving Alberta optimism levels roughly matching those in Manitoba, and below those in British Columbia.

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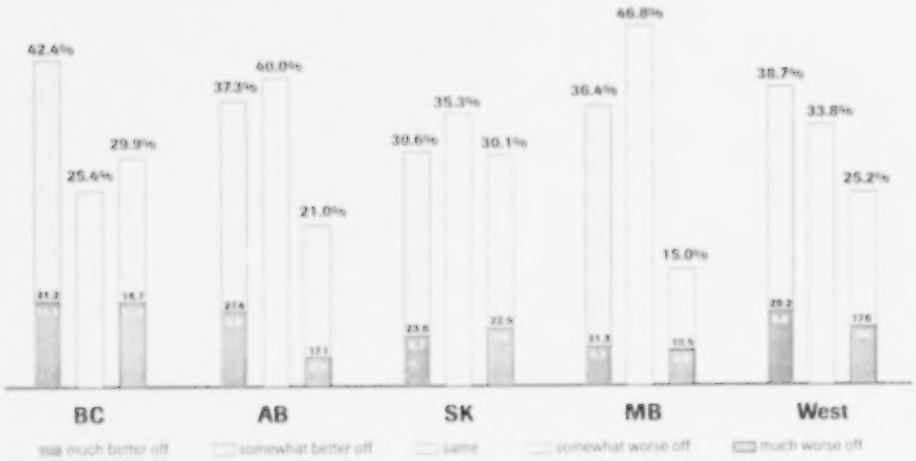

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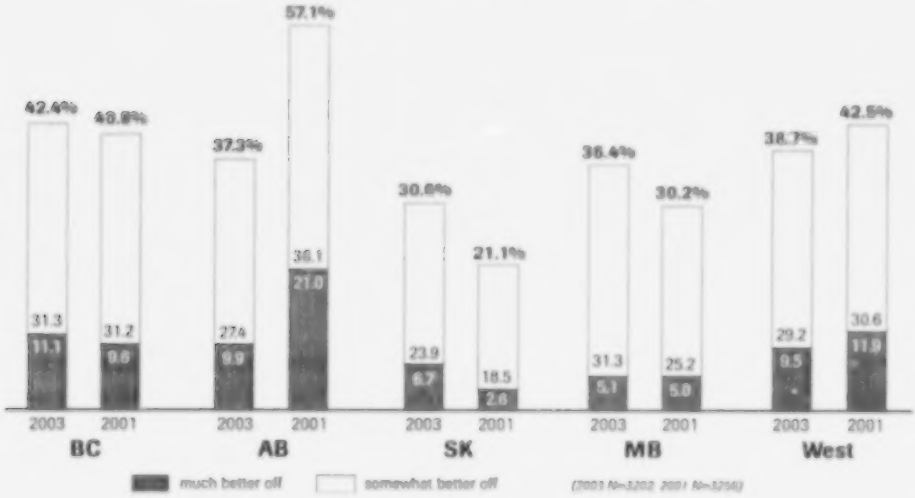
Figure 2: **Province better off in five years, 2003 and 2001**



THE WEST IN CANADA

Western Canada has a long history of regional strain with the rest of Canada and more particularly the federal government, and this pattern continues to this day. The early years of the 21st century have witnessed the sporadic eruption of separatist parties, an ineffectual and frequently abrasive regional voice in the national Parliament, public arguments for provincial "firewalls," and seemingly endless radio programs, editorial commentary, and newspaper opinion pieces voicing regional discontent with the federal system and the federal government.

Over the past three decades, numerous public opinion surveys have demonstrated that western Canadians feel dissatisfied with Canadian federalism, and more specifically with how their particular province fares within the federal system. As the Looking West 2001 survey results documented, feelings of western alienation were high at the start of the century. Has this changed much in two years? The Looking West 2003 explores a number of dimensions of the West's relationship with the rest of Canada, including some questions replicated from the 2001 study. And, as one might expect, the Looking West 2003 survey data indicate that western alienation continues to be a strong presence in the region.

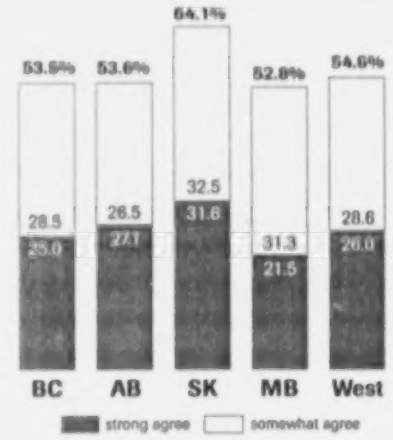
Western Canadians feel under-appreciated by Canada

Western Canadians do not feel valued or appreciated by the rest of Canada. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "People in other parts of Canada do not care about western Canada." A majority in every province agrees with this statement, with agreement being particularly high in Saskatchewan.

Looking at the West as a whole, there are a number of interesting variations on this question. Respondents from medium-sized cities and small towns are more likely to agree than either rural or CMA respondents. Respondents who have post-secondary

education are less likely to agree, as are women, young people (18-29 years of age), and Liberal and NDP voters. Middle income respondents ($30,000 - $69,999 annual household income), middle aged and older respondents (50 - 7? years of age), and Canadian Alliance voters are more likely to agree.

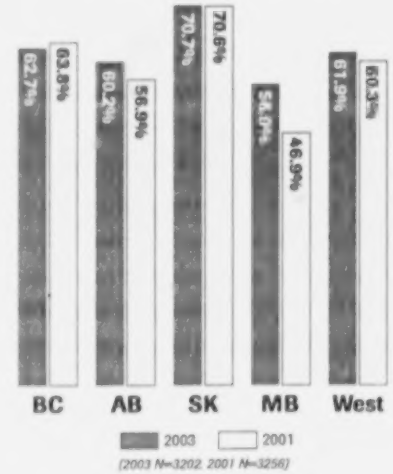
Figure 3:
Rest of Canada does NOT care about West



Western Canadians feel disadvantaged in Canadian federalism; Manitoba dissatisfaction growing

Three Looking West 2003 survey questions probed directly into perceptions of the treatment of provinces within federalism. First, respondents were asked: "In your opinion, is [province] treated with the respect it deserves in Canada?" (This survey question was replicated from the Looking West 2001 survey and from surveys conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.) Six in ten western Canadians responded that their province is not treated with sufficient respect - roughly the same proportion as in the 2001 Looking West survey. Indeed, for British Columbia and Saskatchewan, the 2003 responses are remarkably close to 2001 responses. However, important changes are seen in Alberta and Manitoba: both provinces have a higher number of respondents stating that their province does not receive sufficient respect. Indeed, a solid majority of Manitobans state that their province is not treated with the respect it deserves. Given that Manitoba is traditionally the western province most satisfied with federalism, this change is significant.

Figure 4:
Province is NOT treated with respect it deserves in Canada, 2003 and 2001



A number of demographic variables are related to perceptions of respect. As urban size increases, perceptions of respect also increase - although even in CMAs, a majority of respondents report that their province is not treated with respect. Partisanship impacts perceptions, although it is noteworthy that a majority of voters for all major federal parties report a lack of respect. Indeed, the only demographic category of note that did not have a majority of respondents perceiving a lack of respect is the 18-29 year olds: a majority of those responding in all provinces except Saskatchewan feel their province does in fact receive the respect it deserves.

To continue probing perceptions of provincial treatment in federalism, respondents were asked: "Thinking about all the money the federal government spends on different programs and on transfers to the

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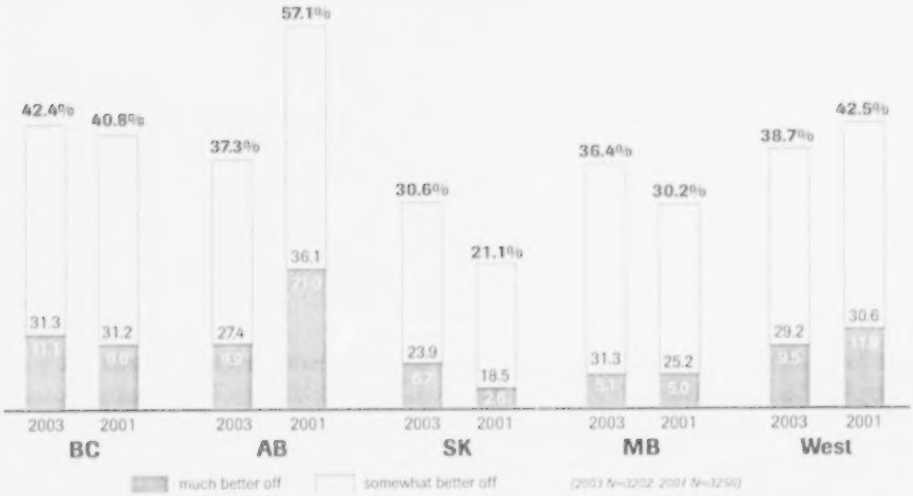

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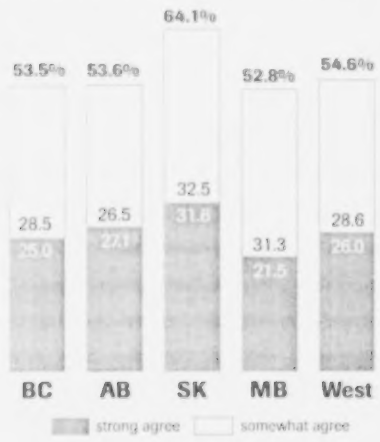

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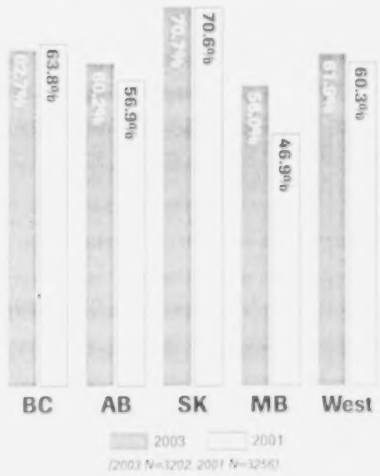
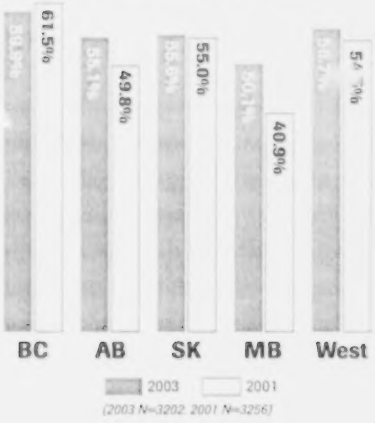


(2003 N=3202, 2001 N=3256)

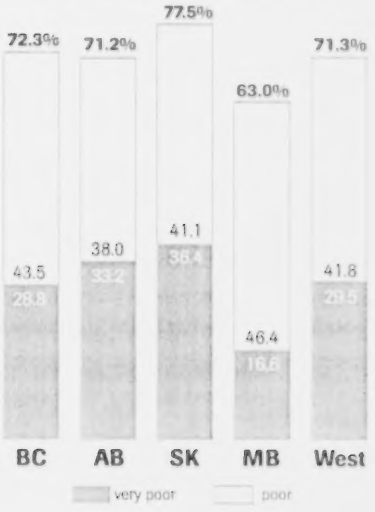
provinces, do you think [province] receives more than its fair share, less than its fair share, or about its fair share?" (This survey question was replicated from the Looking West 2001 survey and from surveys conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.) Again, aggregate responses are relatively consistent: in both 2001 and 2003, six in ten western Canadians responding felt their province receives less than its fair share of federal transfers. However, an interesting change is noted in Manitoba. In 2003, a majority of those responding felt Manitoba received less than its fair share – again demonstrating growing Manitoba dissatisfaction with federalism.

Figure 5:
Province receives LESS than its fair share, 2003 and 2001



Who is most likely to feel that their province does not receive its fair share of federal transfers? Age is a significant determinant, with respondents aged 18-29 in all provinces much less likely to feel their province does not receive its fair share of transfers. Gender is also an important variable, with men more likely than women to state that their province does not receive its fair share. Respondents from small towns and rural areas are modestly more likely than respondents from medium-sized cities and CMAs to say their province receives less. Education levels also play a role, with more highly educated respondents less likely to feel that their province receives less than its fair share. Federal partisanship again emerges as an important variable, but even a majority of Liberal voters report their province does not receive its fair share.

Figure 6:
Provincial interests are poorly/very poorly represented at the federal level



Perhaps part of the reason western Canadians generally feel that they are not getting a "good deal" from Canadian federalism is perceptions of representation at the federal level. In the third question to probe perceptions of provincial treatment in federalism, respondents were asked: "When you think about how issues and concerns are handled by the federal government in Ottawa, do you feel that the interests of [province] are well-represented, adequately represented, poorly represented, or very poorly represented at the federal level?" The number of respondents feeling that their province is poorly or very poorly represented is striking: seven in ten western Canadians do not feel the interests of their province are adequately represented at the federal level. Alberta, assumed in popular debate to be the western province most dissatisfied with federalism, falls well behind Saskatchewan on this question, and even trails British Columbia. Manitoba is again the least aggrieved province, but still, six in ten Manitobans feel the representation is poor.

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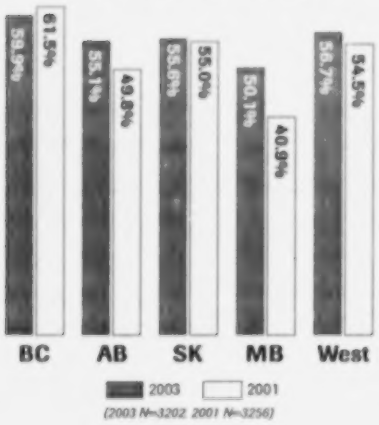

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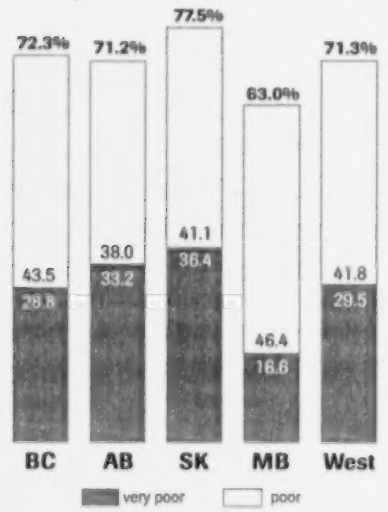

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There are two interesting variations on this question. The first is urban size: as the population size decreases, the number of respondents feeling representation is poor increases. The second is federal partisanship. Not surprisingly, Canadian Alliance voters are the most likely to state representation is poor or very poor (nine in ten). What is striking, however, is the six in ten Liberal voters who report poor or very poor representation. Other variations of note include income (those in middle and upper income categories are more likely to report poor or very poor representation), age (50-79 year olds are most likely to select poor/very poor, although a majority in every age group states representation is poor/very poor) and gender (men are more likely than women to select poor/very poor).

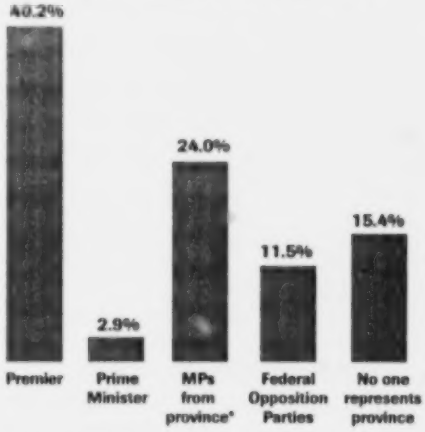
Premiers seen as best voice for province

Given the perceptions of poor representation, it is not surprising that many western Canadians look to their premiers to represent provincial interests. Respondents were asked: "Who best speaks for [province] in national politics?" In every province, premiers are clearly seen as the best voices for provincial interests, and the Prime Minister is the least likely to be seen as the best voice. However, it should be noted that Premiers are not equally seen as the best voice for their provinces: Premiers Ralph Klein of Alberta (58.4%) and Gary Doer of Manitoba (49.1%) are seen by their provincial residents as stronger voices of provincial interests than are Premier Lorne Calvert of Saskatchewan (40.3%), and Premier Gordon Campbell of British Columbia (29.8%), who receives the lowest score of all the premiers. (Premiers were not identified by name, but simply by province.) What is striking is the number of respondents, particularly from BC, who feel "no one represents the interests of [province] on the national stage." This response suggests a stronger degree of dissatisfaction with, or distance from, national politics. It should be noted that rural respondents are also more likely to select this response.

Western Canadians do not see economic advantages to separatism

In both the 2001 and 2003 Looking West surveys, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "[Province] would be better off economically if it separated from Canada." It must be stressed that this is not a hard-line separatism question; by looking at economic implications

Figure 7:
Who best speaks for your province in national politics (West as a whole)



*includes both government and opposition Members of Parliament

Figure 8:
No one represents provincial interests on national stage

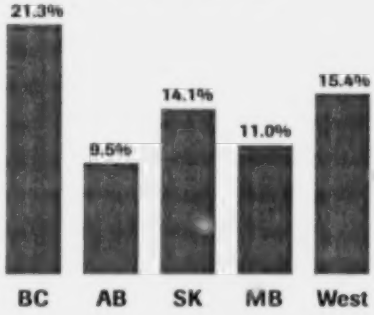
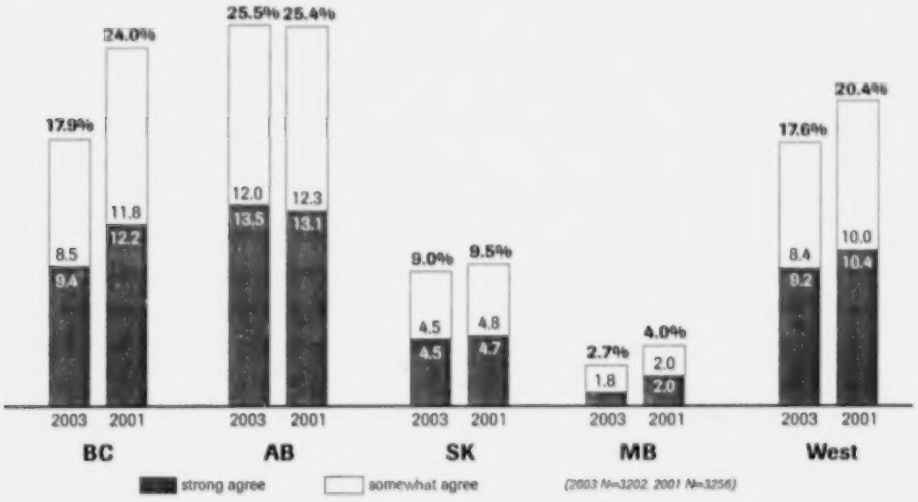


Figure 9: **Province economically better off if separated, 2003 and 2001**



alone, it fails to tap social and emotional ties to belonging to Canada. However, the question does give an understanding of respondents' beliefs about the economic implications of belonging to Canada.

As in 2001, the 2003 survey data reveal little support for the idea that western provinces would be better off economically if they were to leave Canada. Indeed, agreement with the statement decreased significantly in British Columbia, and Manitoba's agreement with the statement dropped even lower than its 2001 levels. In Alberta, the province most associated with western separatist sentiment, the survey data show virtually no change from 2001. Also, as in 2001, the strongest indicator of agreement with this statement is federal partisanship: Canadian Alliance voters are much more likely than voters for other parties to agree with the statement, and NDP voters are the least likely to agree.

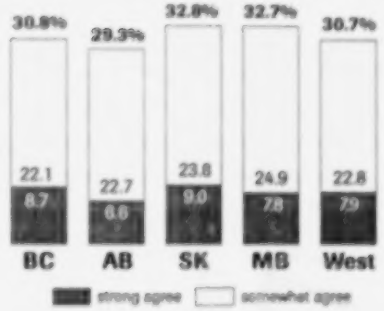
Western Canadians pessimistic about institutional reform; Liberal voters most optimistic

A common western Canadian response to dissatisfaction with federalism is to call for reform to the democratic institutions of federalism. Two institutions often raised as needing reform are the Senate and the electoral system. Indeed, the 2001 Looking West survey found that the majority of western Canadians support both Senate reform (replacing the existing Senate "with an elected Senate with equal representation for each province") and electoral reform (replacing the present electoral system "with an electoral system based on proportional representation – that is, a system that distributes seats to each party according to its share of the popular vote").

However, the Looking West 2003 survey reveals that while western Canadians support and champion institutional reform ideas, they are pessimistic about the likelihood of reform actually occurring. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "The Canadian Senate will be fundamentally reformed in my lifetime." In each province, one quarter of the respondents strongly disagrees, and in each province a strong majority either strongly or somewhat disagrees. Who are most likely to expect

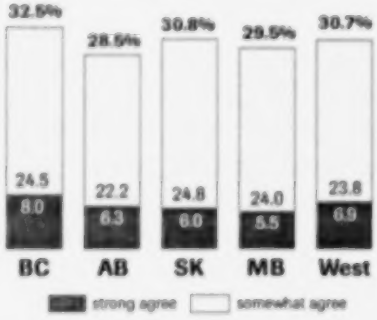
to see fundamental Senate reform in their lifetime? Surprisingly, it is the Liberal voters – almost one in four expect to see Senate reform occur. Canadian Alliance voters are the most pessimistic on this issue. It is interesting to note that even younger respondents, those aged18-29 years, are pessimistic on this front, with only one third agreeing.

Figure 10:
Senate will be fundamentally reformed in my lifetime



Respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "Canada's national electoral system will be fundamentally reformed in my lifetime." Again, western Canadians are pessimistic about the prospects for reform, with one quarter in each province strongly disagreeing, and a strong majority in each province disagreeing. And, once again, Liberal voters are the most optimistic about reform, and Canadian Alliance voters the most pessimistic. On this issue, however, young people are less pessimistic than their elders: four in ten respondents aged 18-29 agree that electoral reform will occur.

Figure 11:
Canada's national electoral system will be fundamentally reformed in my lifetime



Western Canadians want greater regional cooperation

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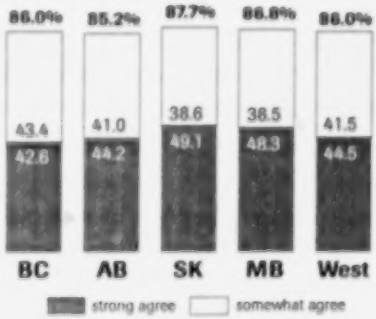
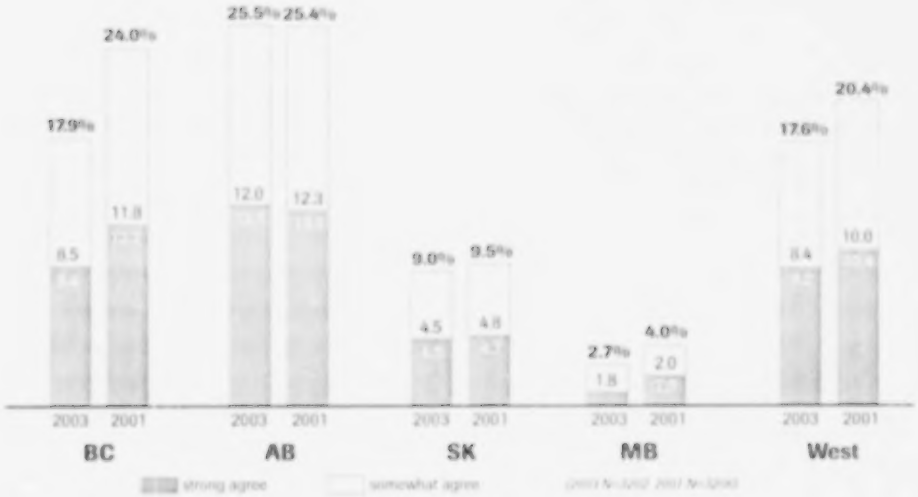
Figure 12:
Stronger voice if western provinces work together



Western Canadians are also enthusiastic about regional cooperation as a means to improve programs in the western provinces. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "[Province] could deliver its

Figure 9: **Province economically better off if separated, 2003 and 2001**



alone, it fails to tap social and emotional ties to belonging to Canada. However, the question does give an understanding of respondents' beliefs about the economic implications of belonging to Canada.

As in 2001, the 2003 survey data reveal little support for the idea that western provinces would be better off economically if they were to leave Canada. Indeed, agreement with the statement decreased significantly in British Columbia, and Manitoba's agreement with the statement dropped even lower than its 2001 levels. In Alberta, the province most associated with western separatist sentiment, the survey data show virtually no change from 2001. Also, as in 2001, the strongest indicator of agreement with this statement is federal partisanship: Canadian Alliance voters are much more likely than voters for other parties to agree with the statement, and NDP voters are the least likely to agree.

Western Canadians pessimistic about institutional reform; Liberal voters most optimistic

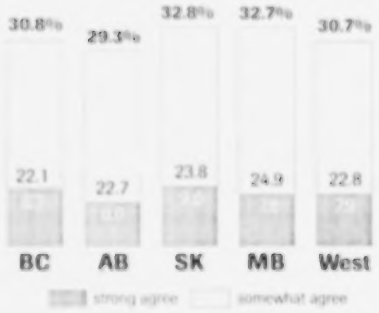
A common western Canadian response to dissatisfaction with federalism is to call for reform to the democratic institutions of federalism. Two institutions often raised as needing reform are the Senate and the electoral system. Indeed, the 2001 Looking West survey found that the majority of western Canadians support both Senate reform (replacing the existing Senate "with an elected Senate with equal representation for each province") and electoral reform (replacing the present electoral system "with an electoral system based on proportional representation – that is, a system that distributes seats to each party according to its share of the popular vote").

However, the Looking West 2003 survey reveals that while western Canadians support and champion institutional reform ideas, they are pessimistic about the likelihood of reform actually occurring. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "The Canadian Senate will be fundamentally reformed in my lifetime." In each province, one quarter of the respondents strongly disagrees, and in each province a strong majority either strongly or somewhat disagrees. Who are most likely to expect

to see fundamental Senate reform in their lifetime? Surprisingly, it is the Liberal voters – almost one in four expect to see Senate reform occur. Canadian Alliance voters are the most pessimistic on this issue. It is interesting to note that even younger respondents, those aged18-29 years, are pessimistic on this front, with only one third agreeing.

Respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "Canada's national electoral system will be fundamentally reformed in my lifetime." Again, western Canadians are pessimistic about the prospects for reform, with one quarter in each province strongly disagreeing, and a strong majority in each province disagreeing. And, once again, Liberal voters are the most optimistic about reform, and Canadian Alliance voters the most pessimistic. On this issue, however, young people are less pessimistic than their elders: four in ten respondents aged 18-29 agree that electoral reform will occur.

Figure 10:
Senate will be fundamentally reformed in my lifetime



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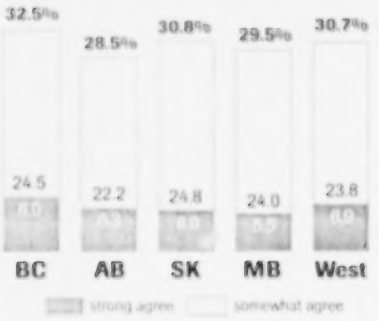

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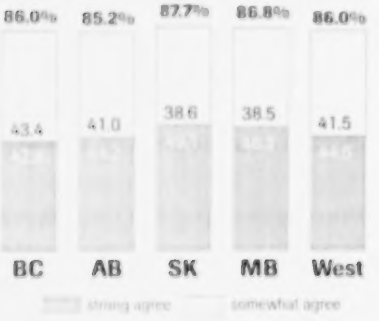

Western Canadians are also enthusiastic about regional cooperation as a means to improve programs in the western provinces. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "[Province] could deliver its

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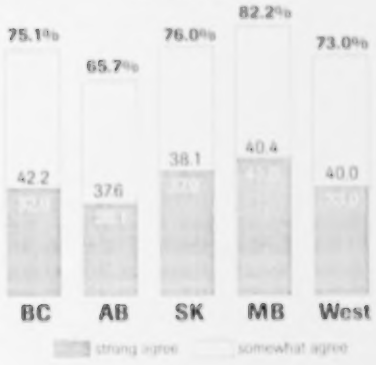
Figure 13
Better program delivery with regional cooperation

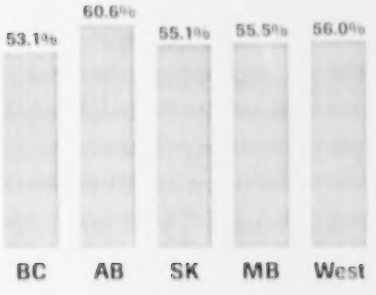


Western Canadians feel provincial governments need more powers, not less

Discussions of federalism in Canada – and more particularly of federal tensions in Canada – often raise questions of the balance of powers between the federal and provincial governments. Previous public opinion studies suggest western Canadians tend to favor decentralization, but the support is not overwhelming; for example, the Looking West 2001 survey found that a very small majority of western Canadians feels the federal government has too much power.

The Looking West 2003 survey examined feelings about decentralization by exploring opinions about the ideal balance of power in the future. Respondents were asked: "Under the Canadian federal system, the government of Canada has responsibility for some services and programs and the provincial governments have responsibility for others. In the future, should the government of Canada have more power, the government of [province] have more power, or should things stay as they are?" (This survey question was replicated from surveys conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.) A small majority of western Canadians feel the provincial government should have more power in the future, with Albertans being the most likely to support this option. Three in ten respondents in each province feel that the balance of powers should remain as it now stands. In every province, less than one in ten respondents feels that the federal government should have more power. (British Columbia and Manitoba respondents are more likely to select this response than are Saskatchewan or Alberta respondents.)

Figure 14
Provincial goverment should have more power in future



The greatest variations on the issue of decentralization are seen with partisanship: Canadian Alliance voters are significantly more likely to favor more provincial power and are the least accepting of the status quo. Attitudes also varied with urban size (respondents living in CMAs are the

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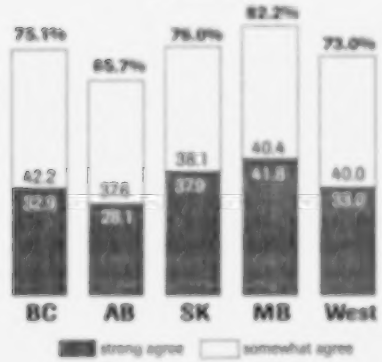

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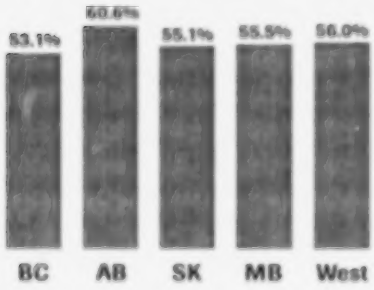

Western Canadians feel provinces need more power, money

Discussions of federalism in Canada – and more particularly of federal tensions in Canada – often raise questions of the balance of powers between the federal and provincial governments. Previous public opinion studies suggest western Canadians tend to favor decentralization, but the support is not overwhelming; for example, the Looking West 2001 survey found that a very small majority of western Canadians feels the federal government has too much power.

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least likely to say that the province should have more power, although a majority still favored this position) and age (middle-aged and older respondents (40-79) are most likely to say the provincial government should have more power in the future, while young (18-29) and old (80+) respondents are more likely than other age categories to say that the status quo should prevail).

The Looking West 2003 survey also probed perceptions of fiscal federalism. Commentators often argue that the balance of fiscal resources in Canada is inappropriate, referring to "vertical fiscal imbalance." However, it is interesting that the survey respondents do not see the federal government as having too many resources. Respondents were asked: "Do you feel that the federal government has enough, too much, or too little revenue to fulfill its current responsibilities?" A near majority of respondents in all provinces feel that the federal government has enough revenue, with the remaining responses divided almost evenly between too much and too little. Alberta respondents are slightly more likely than those from other provinces to say that the federal government has too much revenue. Responses vary with partisanship (Canadian Alliance voters are most likely to say the federal government has too many resources – but even a plurality of Alliance voters feel the revenues are appropriate), age (young respondents (18-29) are most likely to say the federal government has too few resources, and middle-aged to older respondents (50-79) are most likely to say the federal government has too much), and gender (male respondents are much more likely than female respondents to say that the federal government has too many resources, and female respondents are much more likely than male respondents to say the federal government has too little resources).

Given the relative satisfaction with the revenue status quo at the federal level, it is interesting to see reactions to the current state of provincial revenues. Respondents were asked: "Thinking about the [province] government, do you feel that the [province] government has enough, too much, or too little revenue to fulfill its current responsibilities?" Western Canadians are evenly divided between stating their provincial government has enough or too little revenue; only one in ten feel that their provincial government has too much revenue. However, the provincial variations on this question are considerable. Saskatchewan respondents strongly feel that the Saskatchewan government does not have enough revenue to fulfill its current responsibilities, with the majority of Manitoba

Figure 15:
Federal government revenue for current responsibilities (West as a whole)

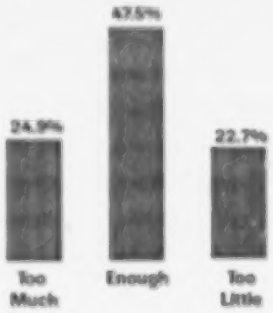


Figure 16:
Provincial government revenue for current responsibilities (West as a whole)

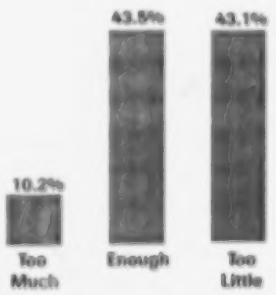
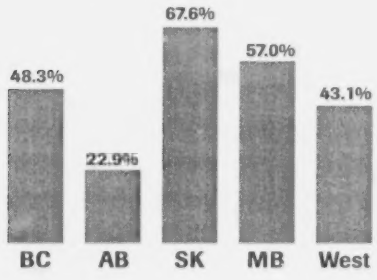


Figure 17:
Provincial government has too little revenue



respondents having the same opinion about the Manitoba government. At the other end of the spectrum, only two in ten Albertans feel that the Alberta government lacks sufficient resources – not surprising given Alberta's recent history of provincial budget surpluses and tax cuts. Indeed, Alberta respondents are more likely than those from other provinces to say that their provincial government has too much revenue. Responses to this question vary with provincial partisanship (measured by voting behavior in the most recent provincial election) in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Alberta Liberals are more likely than voters for other parties to say that the province has too much revenue. In Saskatchewan, voters for the Saskatchewan Party are the least likely to say that their province has too little revenue, while in Manitoba, NDP voters are most likely to say that the province has too little revenue.

POLICY PRIORITIES IN WESTERN CANADA

Public policy debates in Canada typically are dominated by discussions of health care, and western Canada is no exception. Indeed, a common refrain in policy discussions is that there is no "policy room" for anything except health and education. And, of course, the tax cuts issue continues to receive considerable attention – it is hard to imagine a western Canadian policy debate that does not include the ubiquitous statement "there is only one taxpayer."

But is health care really the dominant policy issue in all provinces? Is education firmly the second priority after health? Are people as concerned about tax cuts as popular discourse would suggest? And where do all of the other policy issues – such as environment, cities, transportation, rural economies, Aboriginal issues – fit in the larger picture? Is there a large gap between "top" priority issues and other issues, or do people see many issues as important? In short, is the western Canadian policy agenda as single-focused as some debates might suggest, or is there greater diversity and complexity than most people realize?

To explore these questions, the Looking West 2003 survey asked respondents: "Thinking about what governments can do to ensure the future prosperity and quality of life in [province], would you rate the priority of the following as a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority,

or not a priority?" Thirteen policy fields were explored: lowering taxes; improving [province]'s health care system; improving [province]'s Kindergarten – Grade 12 education system; improving [province]'s post-secondary education system, which includes universities, colleges, technical schools and trades training; investing in [province]'s transportation infrastructure, such as roads, railways, airports and urban transportation systems ("ports" were added for BC respondents); supporting rural industries, such as agriculture and forestry; increasing funding to social services, such as affordable housing and welfare; increasing Aboriginal employment levels; attracting more immigrants to [province]; diversifying [province]'s economy; protecting the environment; retaining [province]'s young people; and ensuring [province] has livable cities. (Question order was rotated by Western Opinion Research to avoid biases related to placement in the list.) Admittedly, there are additional policy questions that could be asked; there is no presumption that only the 13 policy fields probed are of importance to western Canada. However, the issues included provide an interesting snapshot of the variety of issues that are seen as important to western Canadian life – and of the issues that are seen to be of lesser importance. One caveat in reading the data: respondents were not asked to rank the 13 against each other, but rather to rate each individual policy area as a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or not a priority. The policy issues are then ranked in the analysis stage based on the percentage of respondents indicating a policy area is a high priority.

Western Canadians concerned about health care, retaining young, environment

As expected, "improving the health care system" receives the largest percentage of respondents rating it as a high priority, with three-quarters of all western Canadians selecting this rating. However, the data become very interesting (and surprising) when one looks beyond the top spot. Looking at the region as a whole, findings of particular interest include:

- Neither "improving the province's Kindergarten – Grade 12 education system" or "improving [province]'s post-secondary education system" are in the top four priorities.
- "Lowering taxes" barely makes it into the top ten priorities.
- Almost seven in ten western Canadians feel that "retaining their province's young people" is a high priority for the future of the province. These responses likely reflect concerns about population aging, the need for an ongoing tax base, and the need for human capital in the future economy. However, it is interesting to note at the same time the relatively low ranking of "increasing Aboriginal employment levels" and "attracting more immigrants", two policy options commonly discussed as partial solutions to future labour needs. The number of western Canadians rating attracting more immigrants as a high priority is particularly low.
- Almost two-thirds of western Canadians rank "protecting the environment" as a high priority.
- Although western Canada has urbanized considerably in the past three decades (with current urbanization rates matching those in the rest of Canada), there are still high levels of concern with "supporting rural industries." Indeed, the number of western Canadians rating "supporting rural industries" as a high priority is 10 percentage points higher than is the number rating "ensuring livable cities" as a high priority.

In addition to these surprises, there are also some expected results. Increasing funding to social services ranks relatively low, and diversifying provincial economies, while seen by a majority as a high priority, sits in the middle of the list. The transportation sector often complains that infrastructure investments rank low in public opinion, and the Looking West 2003 survey validates their complaint. The priority ratings for each policy area – including identification of important variations – are presented in Figure 20.

Figure 18: **Policy area is "High Priority"** (West as a whole)

Health care not number one in all provinces

The data show considerable variation among the four provinces. One of the most surprising findings is that in two provinces - Saskatchewan and Manitoba – "retaining the province's young people" beats out "improving the health care system" for the number one spot. This demonstrates the concern residents of these provinces have with provincial out-migration. It is also noteworthy that this item is number two in British Columbia, a province that recently shifted to having net out-migration after over a decade of net in-migration. A second interesting finding is the high ranking of "protecting the environment" in Alberta – a province often viewed from the outside as being less interested in environmental issues.

Figure 19: **Top five "high proirites" by province**

British Columbia	**Alberta**	**Saskatchewan**	**Manitoba**
Health (77.6%)	Health (70.0%)	Young (79.2%)	Young (77.5%)
Young (67.3%)	Environment (63.6%)	Health (70.4%)	Health (74.9%)
Environment (66.1%)	K-12 (61.0%)	Rural (66.4%)	Environment (63.5%)
Rural (65.1%)	Young (60.6%)	Environment (57.7%)	Rural (58.5%)
K-12 (62.5%)	Rural (57.4%)	Economic Diversity (57.0%)	K-12 (54.9%)

Despite these variations, it is the similarities rather than the differences among the provinces that are particularly striking. Four policy issues - health care, retaining young people, environment and supporting rural industries – rank in the top five high priorities for each western province. A fifth policy issue - K-12 education - ranks in the top five for three western provinces. Indeed, the only deviation in the make-up of the top five issues across the four provinces is found in Saskatchewan, where economic diversification is present and K-12 education absent. Despite their unique policy environments, political situations, economic circumstances and provincial cultures, in terms of policy priorities the four western provinces are more similar than they are different.

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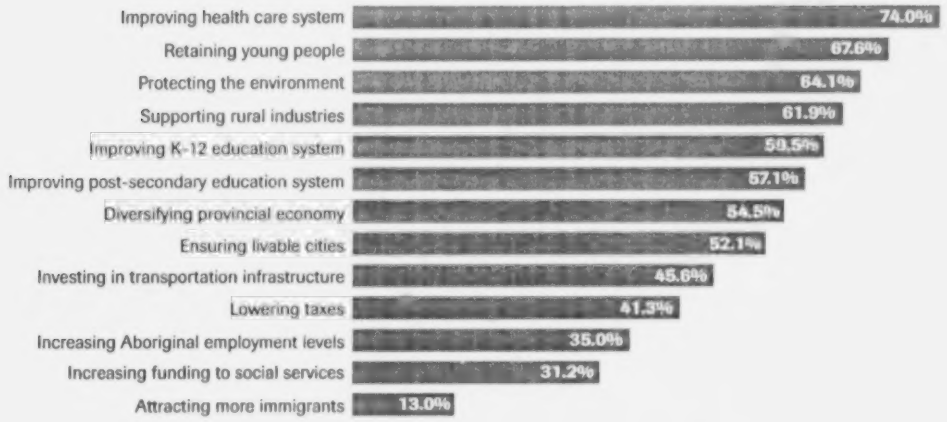

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Figure 20 (continued): **Policy Priorities** (West as a whole)

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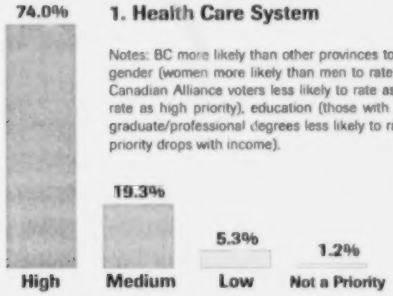
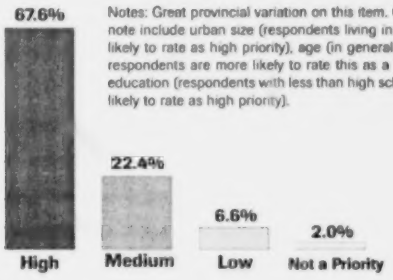


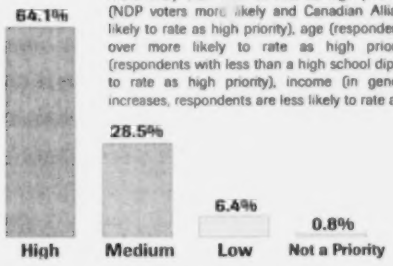
Notes: BC more likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include gender (women more likely than men to rate as high priority), partisanship (NDP voters more likely and Canadian Alliance voters less likely to rate as high priority), age (respondents aged 70-79 more likely to rate as high priority), education (those with less than high school diploma more likely and those with graduate/professional degrees less likely to rate as high priority), and income (percentage rating as high priority drops with income).

2. Retaining Young People



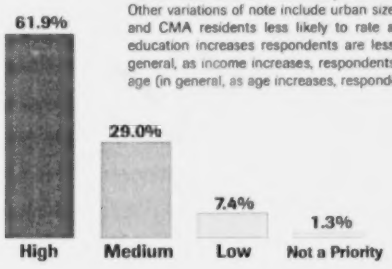
Notes: Great provincial variation on this item. Other variations of note include urban size (respondents living in small towns more likely to rate as high priority), age (in general, as age increases respondents are more likely to rate this as a high priority), and education (respondents with less than high school diploma more likely to rate as high priority).

3. Environment



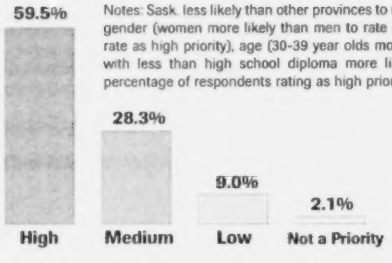
Notes: Sask. less likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include gender (women more likely than men to rate as high priority), partisanship (NDP voters more likely and Canadian Alliance voters less likely to rate as high priority), age (respondents aged 80 and over more likely to rate as high priority), education (respondents with less than a high school diploma more likely to rate as high priority), income (in general, as income increases, respondents are less likely to rate as high priority).

4. Rural Industries



Notes: Sask. and BC more likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include urban size (rural and small town residents more likely and CMA residents less likely to rate as high priority), education (in general, as education increases respondents are less likely to rate as high priority), income (in general, as income increases, respondents are less likely to rate as high priority), and age (in general, as age increases, respondents are less likely to rate as high priority).

5. K-12 Education

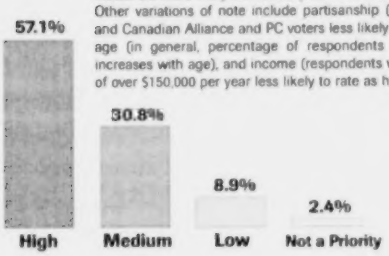


Notes: Sask. less likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include gender (women more likely than men to rate as high priority), partisanship (NDP voters more likely to rate as high priority), age (30-39 year olds more likely to rate as high priority), education (respondents with less than high school diploma more likely to rate as high priority), and income (in general, percentage of respondents rating as high priority decreases with income).

Figure 20 (continued): **Policy Priorities** (West as a whole)

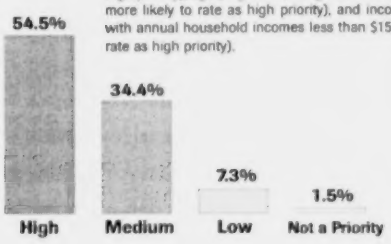
6. Post-Secondary Education

Notes: BC more likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include partisanship (NDP voters more likely and Canadian Alliance and PC voters less likely to rate as high priority), age (in general, percentage of respondents rating as high priority increases with age), and income (respondents with household incomes of over $150,000 per year less likely to rate as high priority).



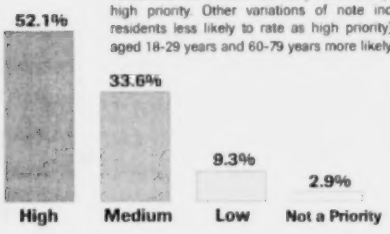
7. Economic Diversification

Notes: Alberta and Man. less likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include gender (men more likely than women to rate as high priority), partisanship (Canadian Alliance voters more likely to rate as high priority), age (in general, as age increases, respondents are more likely to rate as high priority), and income (respondents with annual household incomes less than $15,000 less likely to rate as high priority).



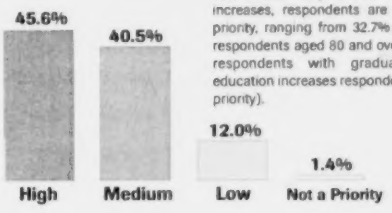
8. Liveable Cities

Notes: Sask. and Man. less likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include urban size (rural residents less likely to rate as high priority) and age (respondents aged 18-29 years and 60-79 years more likely to rate as high priority).



9. Transportation

Notes: Sask. and Man. more likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include gender (men more likely than women to rate as high priority), partisanship (Canadian Alliance voters more likely and NDP voters less likely to rate as high priority), age (as age increases, respondents are more likely to rate as a high priority, ranging from 32.7% of 18-29 year olds to 65.0% of respondents aged 80 and over), education (with exception of respondents with graduate/professional degrees, as education increases respondents are less likely to rate as high priority).



10. Lowering Taxes

Notes: BC less likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include partisanship (Canadian Alliance voters more likely and Liberal and NDP voters less likely to rate as high priority), education (respondents with Bachelor degrees less likely and those with less than high school diploma more likely to rate as high priority), and income (higher income respondents are less likely than lower income respondents to rate this as a high priority).

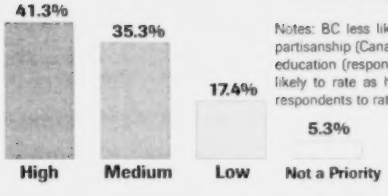
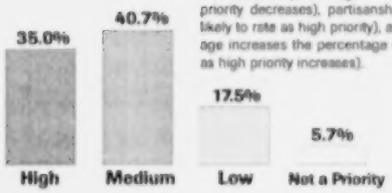


Figure 20 (continued): **Policy Priorities** (West as a whole)

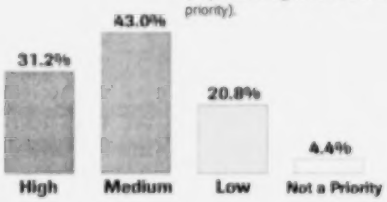
11. Aboriginal Employment

Notes: Sask. more likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include education (respondents with less than high school diploma more likely to rate as high priority), income (with the exception of respondents with annual household incomes of over $150,000, as income increases, the percentage of respondents rating high priority decreases), partisanship (NDP voters more likely to rate as high priority), and age (in general, as age increases the percentage of respondents rating as high priority increases).



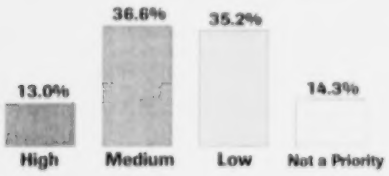
12. Social Services

Notes: Sask. and Man. less likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include gender (women more likely than men to rate as high priority), education (respondents with less than high school diploma more likely to rate as high priority), income (in general, as income increases, respondents are less likely to rate as high priority), partisanship (NDP voters more likely and Canadian Alliance voters less likely to rate as high priority), and age (respondents aged 70 and over more likely to rate as high priority).



13. Immigration

Notes: Man. and Sask. more likely than other provinces to rate this as a high priority. Other variations of note include urban size (CMA residents more likely and smaller city residents less likely to rate as high priority) and education (in general, as education increases, respondents are more likely to rate as high priority).



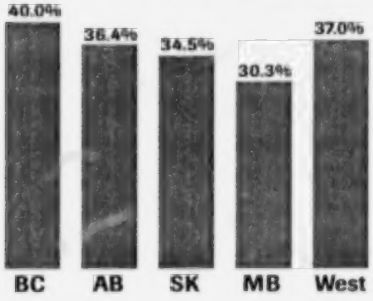
URBAN AND RURAL ISSUES

In recent years, there has been considerable debate about the role of local governments – particularly in large cities such as Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina and Victoria – in western Canada. It is often argued that local governments lack the resources they need to fulfill their responsibilities, and that local governments may need more powers in the future to meet growing demands to engage in a wider range of activities. There have also been debates about how local governments should be financed – if the current property-tax dependent status quo is appropriate, or if local governments should have access to a greater range of tax tools.

How do western Canadians feel about such issues? Do large city, medium-sized city, small town and rural residents have strongly differing views? Are some local finance options more popular than others? The Looking West 2003 survey examined these questions, and found some important gaps between the growing urban debate and public opinion.

Western Canadians divided on issues of provincial-local balance of powers, local revenues

Figure 21:
Local government should have more power in the future



To examine perceptions relating to the balance of powers between provincial and local governments, respondents were asked: "In [province], the provincial government has responsibility for some services and programs and the local governments have responsibility for others. In the future, should the government of [province] have more power, the local governments have more power, or should things stay as they are?" Responses are almost equally split between more local government power (37.0%) and the status quo (40.7%), with two in ten (19.4%) stating that provincial governments should have more power in the future. It should be noted that in British Columbia, the plurality (40.0%) stated that local governments should have more power, while Manitoba had the greatest proportion of all provinces (25.3%) stating that the provincial government should have more power. Looking just at the percentages responding that local governments should have more power in the future, it is interesting that support decreases as one moves from west to east.

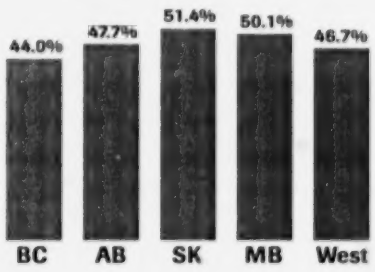
It might be assumed that responses would vary with urban size, and that large city respondents would be most likely to state that local governments should have more power. These assumptions are only half right: opinions do vary with urban size, but as urban size decreases, respondents are more likely to say local government should have more power. Responses range from 35.0% for CMAs to 41.1% for rural. There are also interesting income and federal partisanship variations on this question: high income respondents are less likely to say more local power and more likely to select the status quo and NDP federal voters are more likely to say more local power.

Respondents were also asked, "Thinking about your local government, do you feel that your local government has enough, too much, or too little revenue to fulfill its current responsibilities?" Here again, responses are almost evenly divided: 46.7% feel that local governments have too little revenue, and 43.8% feel that local governments have enough revenue. Only one in twenty respondents feels that local governments have too much revenue. British Columbia is the only province in which the plurality (45.8%) feels local government has enough revenue.

Urban size has surprisingly little bearing on responses; the only variations of note are that smaller city residents are slightly less likely and small town residents are slightly more likely to say that local governments have too

little revenue. Important variations are found in terms of federal partisanship, however: Canadian Alliance voters are less likely and Progressive Conservative and NDP voters more likely to say too little revenue. In addition, variations are found with income (as income increases, respondents are less likely to say too little), age (30-49 year olds are more likely to say too little) and education (respondents with less than grade 12 are more likely to say too little).

Figure 22:
Local government has too little revenue



Western Canadians prefer transfers to local governments and private service delivery over new local taxes, user fees.

To examine attitudes toward various local government revenue options, respondents were asked: "There has been a lot of debate about the need to change the types of revenue sources available to municipal governments. Please indicate if you would strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose each of the following revenue options. For each, assume that the option would result in no increase in total taxation, but rather a change in how current tax revenues are raised." The four revenue options examined in the survey were "transferring a portion of the taxes currently collected by federal and provincial governments (such as sales, income or gasoline taxes) to municipal governments"; "cutting property taxes and in their place introducing different, locally collected taxes, such as a municipal sales or income tax"; "increasing user fees for municipal services, such as water, transit and recreation" and "allowing private companies to deliver some services, like garbage collection or road maintenance, that are currently delivered by municipal governments."

"Transferring a portion of the taxes currently collected by federal and provincial governments (such as sales, income or gasoline taxes) to municipal governments" is the most popular option, with almost eight in ten western Canadians being supportive. Respondents from British Columbia are somewhat less enthusiastic than the other three provinces (74.7% support), but support is still high. Urban size had very little impact on responses, with the exception of rural respondents being slightly less supportive. Interestingly, differences related to federal partisanship are negligible. Responses do vary with age: in general, and excluding respondents aged 80 and over, as age increases, support for this option increases.

Figure 23:
Support for local finance options
(West as a whole)

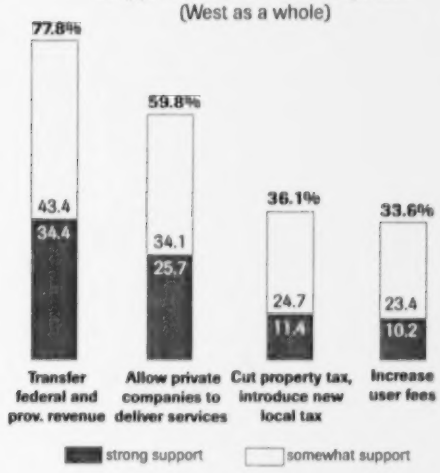
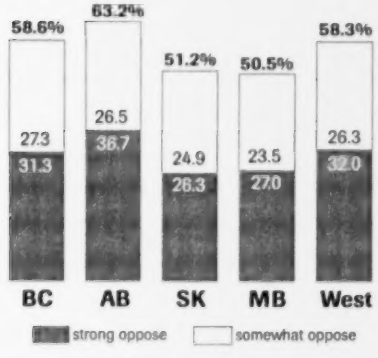


Figure 24:
Opposition to new local taxes in place of lower property tax



The second most popular option is "allowing private companies to deliver some services, like garbage collection or road maintenance, that are currently delivered by municipal governments," with six in ten supporting this option (one in four strongly supporting). Responses are evenly supportive across the four provinces. A large partisanship variation is seen on this question, with only four in ten of federal NDP voters supporting this option; in contrast, seven in ten Canadian Alliance voters are supportive. Support also varies with urban size (as urban size decreases, support increases), age (as age increases, support decreases), income (in general, as income increases, support increases), and education (respondents with less than a high school diploma are less supportive).

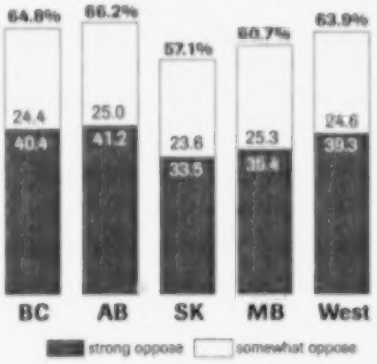
The idea of "cutting property taxes and in their place introducing different, locally collected taxes, such as a municipal sales or income tax" is opposed by almost six in ten western Canadians. Respondents from Alberta and British Columbia are particularly opposed to this option. There are some variations in urban size, with opposition highest among CMA respondents and lowest among small town respondents. Responses vary with income (in general, as income increases, opposition increases), education (respondents with less than high school are least opposed, while respondents with some university/college or completed university degrees – including graduate/professional degrees – are highly opposed), federal partisanship (Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative voters are modestly more opposed than are Liberal or NDP voters) and age (40 – 59 year olds are the most opposed to this).

The least popular option considered is "increasing user fees for municipal services, such as water, transit and recreation"; over six in ten western Canadians oppose this option. Respondents from Alberta and British Columbia are again particularly opposed. There is an interesting gender split on this question, with women significantly more opposed than men. Opposition is lower in small towns and rural areas than in the medium-sized cities and CMAs. Again, responses varied with education (respondents with graduate/professional degrees are most opposed), income (those with incomes of $90,000 and above are least opposed), federal partisanship (Canadian Alliance voters are least opposed, while NDP voters are most opposed), and age (respondents aged 18-29 years and aged 70-79 years are most opposed).

Western Canadians feel urban and rural areas entitled to same level of services, despite cost

There are often debates about the "growing urban-rural divide" in the West, with many rural residents expressing concerns about the quality of government services in rural areas, and many urban residents expressing concerns about the cost of servicing rural areas. To probe western Canadian opinions on these issues, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "Governments should ensure that rural communities and urban communities have the same level of government services, even if it costs more to provide equal services in the rural communities." Two-thirds of western Canadians agree with this statement, with agreement being highest in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. As one might expect, responses do vary with urban size, but it is noteworthy that two-thirds of CMA residents agree with the statement. Other variations of note include gender (women are more likely to agree than men), education (respondents with university degrees – either bachelor or graduate/professional – are less likely to agree), income (respondents with annual household incomes above $70,000 are less likely to agree), federal partisanship (NDP voters are more likely to agree, while Progressive Conservative voters are less likely to agree), and age (in general, as age increases, agreement levels increase).

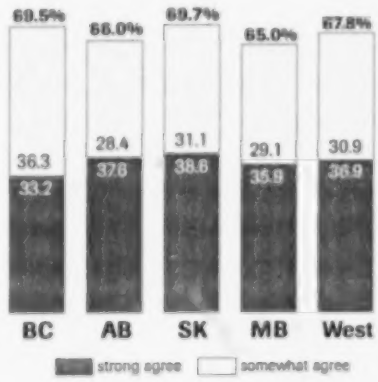
Figure 25:
Opposition to increased local user fees



TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN WESTERN CANADA

There are growing concerns in western Canada about the transportation system; many argue that western Canada's transportation system needs significant investment in the years ahead to ensure it meets future demands. There are also concerns raised about how this investment might occur, as there is a strong sentiment that governments currently lack the resources or political will to invest more in transportation infrastructure. These concerns have given rise to suggestions for dedicated fuel taxes to pay for infrastructure, for the creation of infrastructure or local bonds, and for user fees. The Looking West 2003 survey demonstrates that western Canadians are open to a number of financing options for infrastructure, but are split in their opinions of the state of the current system.

Figure 26:
Agree urban-rural services should be at same level



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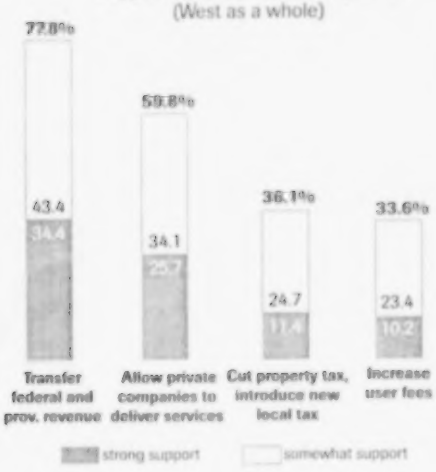

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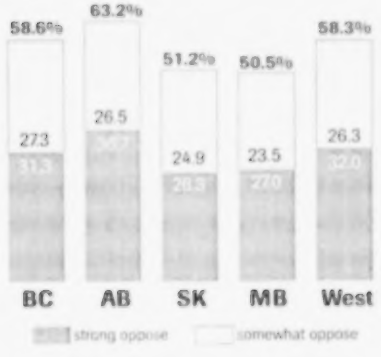

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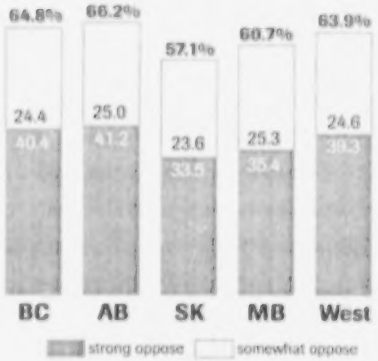

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN WESTERN CANADA

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Figure 26:
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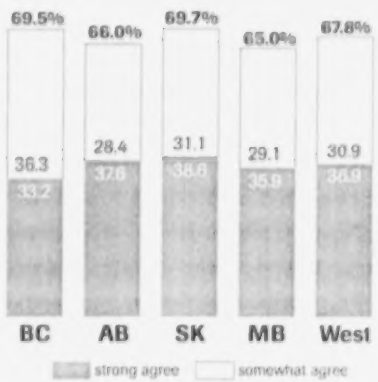
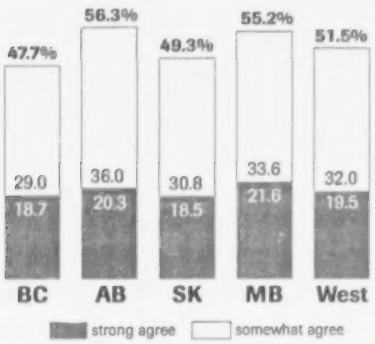


Figure 27:
Agree West has adequate transportation system



Western Canadians show significant concerns about adequacy of transportation system

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "Western Canada has the transportation system it needs to compete in global markets." A small majority of western Canadians agree with this statement, but over four in ten disagree. Indeed, in British Columbia, almost exactly as many people agree as disagree. Overall, Alberta and Manitoba respondents are most positive, while Saskatchewan and British Columbia respondents are more likely to express reservations about the state of the regional transportation system. Responses also vary with gender (men are more likely to agree than are women) and education (respondents with some or completed university degrees – including graduate/professional degrees – are less likely to agree).

Western Canadians want dedicated fuel taxes and bonds, but oppose toll roads and user fees

To explore attitudes toward different financing options, respondents were asked the following: "As governments look to how they are going to pay for transportation infrastructure (such as highways, ports, railways and airports) in the years ahead, how would you view the following financing options?" The three options considered were "committing a percentage of the money raised through taxes on gasoline to fund transportation infrastructure"; "allowing Canadians to personally invest in local infrastructure projects by buying stocks or bonds"; and "developing a system of toll roads or other "user fee" models."

The most popular option is "committing a percentage of the money raised through taxes on gasoline to fund transportation infrastructure": over eight in ten respondents in each province support this option. In the three prairie provinces, one in two respondents strongly support this option. Variations of note include education (respondents with university degrees – bachelor or graduate/professional – are more supportive, and respondents with less than grade 12 slightly less supportive), income (respondents with less than $15,000 annual household income are somewhat less supportive), and partisanship (Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative federal voters are most supportive); however, it

should be noted that even for cohorts that are "less supportive", support is still seven in ten respondents.

Respondents are also supportive of "allowing Canadians to personally invest in local infrastructure projects by buying stocks or bonds," with almost eight in ten supporting this option. The provinces do not vary significantly in their support. Indeed, the only variations of note on this option are education (respondents with less than high school education are slightly less supportive), income (respondents with less than $15,000 annual household income are slightly less supportive), partisanship (NDP federal voters are slightly less supportive), and age (respondents aged 70 and over are less supportive).

The last option considered, "developing a system of toll roads or other user fee models," fares much more poorly, with a majority in all provinces opposing the option. However, British Columbia respondents are significantly more supportive, with almost five in ten supporting. Other variations of note include urban size (CMA residents are more supportive of the toll road/user fee option), education (respondents with university degrees – bachelor or graduate/professional – are more supportive, and respondents with less than grade 12 more opposed), partisanship (federal Liberal voters are almost equally divided between support and opposition, while NDP voters are more opposed), and age (as age increases, opposition increases).

Figure 28:
Support for transportation financing options (West as a whole)

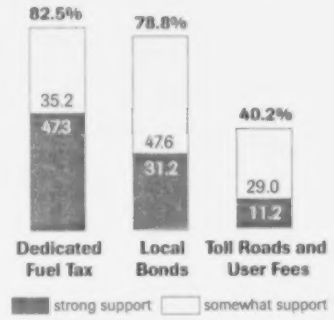
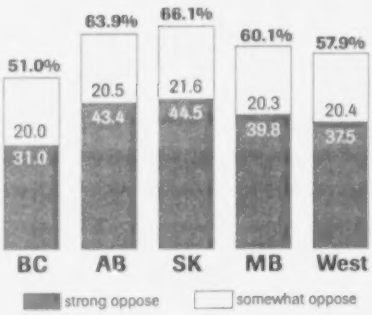


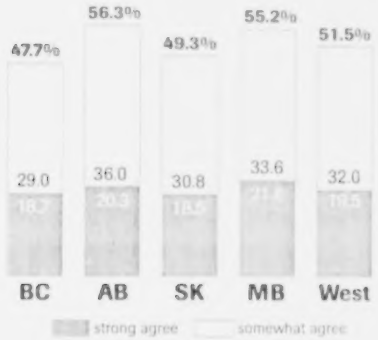
Figure 29:
Opposition to toll roads/user fee models to finance transportation system



HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE WEST

Due to population aging, retirement patterns, and interprovincial and international mobility, there are growing concerns about the future supply of labour in the West. A number of strategies are often raised in response to anticipated labour supply shortages in the years ahead: finding ways to retain young people and attract migrants from other provinces; finding ways to increase Aboriginal participation in the labour force; finding ways to attract and retain immigrants; and finding ways to alter retirement patterns and retain older workers. The Looking West 2003 survey tapped into two dimensions of the labour supply in the West: mobility and Aboriginal labour force engagement.

Figure 27:
Agree West has adequate transportation system



Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "Western Canada has the transportation system it needs to compete in global markets." A small majority of western Canadians agree with this statement, but over four in ten disagree. Indeed, in British Columbia, almost exactly as many people agree as disagree. Overall, Alberta and Manitoba respondents are most positive, while Saskatchewan and British Columbia respondents are more likely to express reservations about the state of the regional transportation system. Responses also vary with gender (men are more likely to agree than are women) and education (respondents with some or completed university degrees – including graduate/professional degrees – are less likely to agree).

Western Canadians want dedicated fuel taxes and bonds, but oppose toll roads and user fees

To explore attitudes toward different financing options, respondents were asked the following: "As governments look to how they are going to pay for transportation infrastructure (such as highways, ports, railways and airports) in the years ahead, how would you view the following financing options?" The three options considered were "committing a percentage of the money raised through taxes on gasoline to fund transportation infrastructure"; "allowing Canadians to personally invest in local infrastructure projects by buying stocks or bonds"; and "developing a system of toll roads or other "user fee" models."

The most popular option is "committing a percentage of the money raised through taxes on gasoline to fund transportation infrastructure": over eight in ten respondents in each province support this option. In the three prairie provinces, one in two respondents strongly support this option. Variations of note include education (respondents with university degrees – bachelor or graduate/professional – are more supportive, and respondents with less than grade 12 slightly less supportive), income (respondents with less than $15,000 annual household income are somewhat less supportive), and partisanship (Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative federal voters are most supportive); however, it

should be noted that even for cohorts that are "less supportive", support is still seven in ten respondents.

Respondents are also supportive of "allowing Canadians to personally invest in local infrastructure projects by buying stocks or bonds," with almost eight in ten supporting this option. The provinces do not vary significantly in their support. Indeed, the only variations of note on this option are education (respondents with less than high school education are slightly less supportive), income (respondents with less than $15,000 annual household income are slightly less supportive), partisanship (NDP federal voters are slightly less supportive), and age (respondents aged 70 and over are less supportive).

The last option considered, "developing a system of toll roads or other user fee models," fares much more poorly, with a majority in all provinces opposing the option. However, British Columbia respondents are significantly more supportive, with almost five in ten supporting. Other variations of note include urban size (CMA residents are more supportive of the toll road/user fee option), education (respondents with university degrees – bachelor or graduate/professional – are more supportive, and respondents with less than grade 12 more opposed), partisanship (federal Liberal voters are almost equally divided between support and opposition, while NDP voters are more opposed), and age (as age increases, opposition increases).

Figure 28:
Support for transportation financing options (West as a whole)

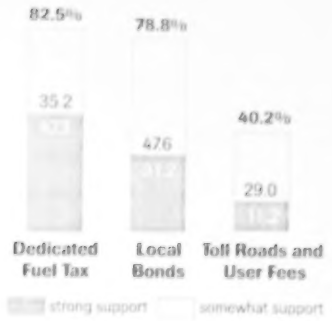
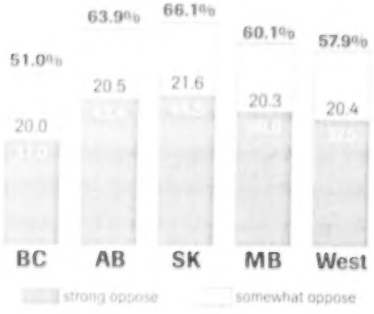


Figure 29:
Opposition to toll roads/user fee models to finance transportation system



HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE WEST

Due to population aging, retirement patterns, and interprovincial and international mobility, there are growing concerns about the future supply of labour in the West. A number of strategies are often raised in response to anticipated labour supply shortages in the years ahead: finding ways to retain young people and attract migrants from other provinces; finding ways to increase Aboriginal participation in the labour force; finding ways to attract and retain immigrants; and finding ways to alter retirement patterns and retain older workers. The Looking West 2003 survey tapped into two dimensions of the labour supply in the West: mobility and Aboriginal labour force engagement.

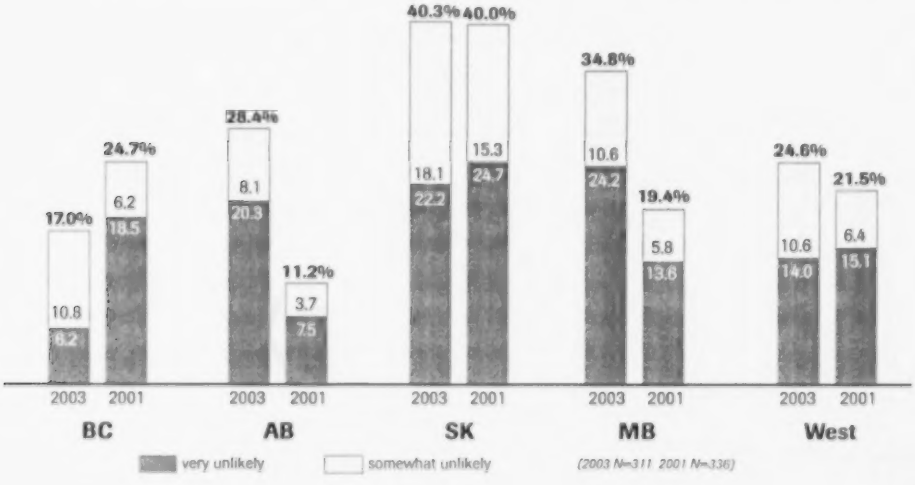
Growing proportion of Alberta and Manitoba young people anticipate leaving province

To examine anticipated mobility, respondents were asked: "When you think of your own life five years from now, how likely is it that you will still be living in [province]?" This question was replicated from the Looking West 2001 survey. As in 2001, the vast majority of western Canadians anticipate remaining in their current province, with almost nine in ten respondents saying it is likely they would still be living in their current province, and seven in ten saying it is very likely. Saskatchewan respondents are slightly less likely to say they anticipate staying. Urban respondents (both CMA and medium-sized city) and respondents in the highest ($150,000 and over) and lowest ($15,000 and under) income categories are more likely to anticipate leaving the province in the next five years, while middle-income respondents (with annual household incomes between $30,000 – 89,999) are less likely to anticipate leaving.

Of course, looking at the sample as a whole does not tell the true story. Individuals are much more likely to move when they are younger, and before factors such as marriage, family, career and property ownership cause them to establish deeper roots in a particular area. This is seen in the survey results: as age increases, respondents are more likely to state that they anticipate still living in their current province in five years. (One notable exception to this pattern is the 80 and over age category, in which 10.1% state it is unlikely that they would still be living in their current province. Of course, this response may represent anticipation regarding life expectancy as much as mobility.)

Looking at the 18-24 year old respondents, some important patterns are seen. First, Saskatchewan continues to have a very high proportion of young people who anticipate leaving the province. Second, a growing proportion of young people in both Manitoba and Alberta are anticipating moving out-of-province; indeed, the gap between Manitoba and Saskatchewan has closed considerably. And third, the proportion of young people anticipating leaving British Columbia has decreased since 2001. Not all young people equally anticipate moving, however. Among 18-24 year olds, it is those with a bachelor degree (44.3%) who are

Figure 30: **Unlikely to be living in province in 5 years** (18-24 years olds), **2003 and 2001**



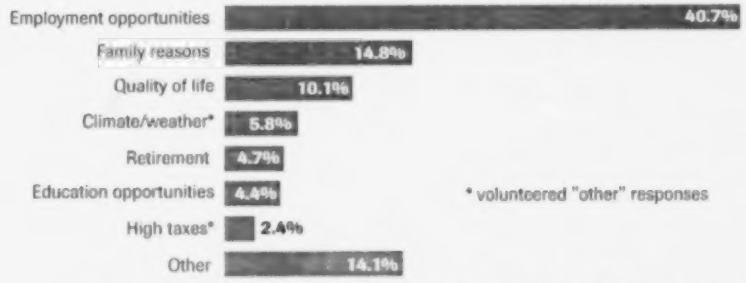
more likely to anticipate leaving their province within five years – suggesting a strong "brain drain" mobility issue. Urban size also factored in; among 18-24 year olds, as urban size increased, respondents are more likely to anticipate leaving their province within five years.

What would cause residents of any age to leave their current province? Respondents who stated it is somewhat or very unlikely that they would live in their current province in five years were asked a follow-up question: "If you were to leave [province] in the next five years, what would be the most likely reason?" The most common reason given is employment opportunities, with four in ten giving this response. It is notable that Saskatchewan respondents are more likely to give this response, and Alberta respondents are less likely to do so. Other interesting provincial variations include:

- Alberta and British Columbia respondents are more likely than those from other provinces to select family reasons;
- British Columbia respondents are less likely than those from other provinces to select quality of life as a reason for moving;
- Manitoba and Saskatchewan respondents are more likely than those from other provinces to state they would move for education reasons;
- Manitoba respondents are more likely than those from other provinces to move for retirement;
- Alberta and Manitoba respondents are more likely than those from other provinces to state they would move for climate/weather reasons (a self-reported response to the "other" category); and
- Saskatchewan respondents are more likely than those from other provinces to move due to high taxes (a self-reported response to the "other" category).

There are also numerous interesting demographic variations in the reasons for which people anticipate moving. To provide but a few examples: rural respondents are less likely to anticipate moving out of province for employment opportunities, and more likely to anticipate moving for family reasons or education opportunities; CMA residents are more likely to anticipate moving for quality of life; and respondents aged 60-69 are most likely to anticipate moving for weather/climate reasons.

Figure 31: **Reason might leave province** (West as a whole)



(N=349. Only respondents who stated it is unlikely they would live in their current province in five years were asked this question.)

Growing proportion of Alberta and Manitoba young people anticipate leaving province

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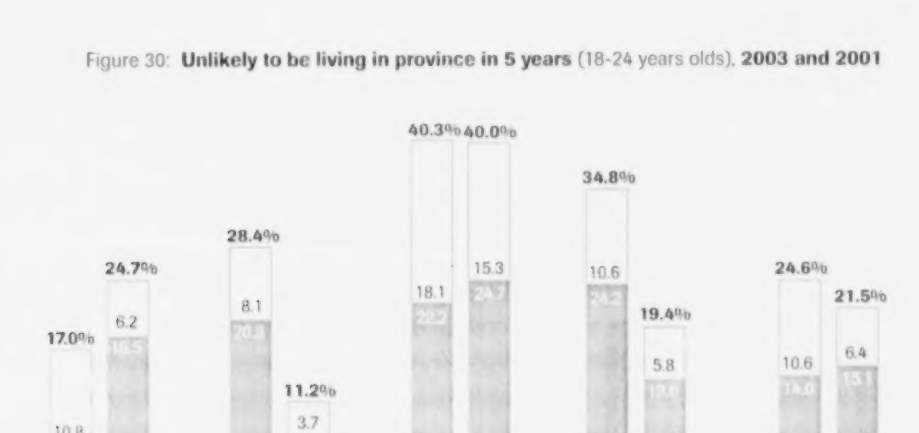

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- Manitoba respondents are more likely than those from other provinces to move for retirement;
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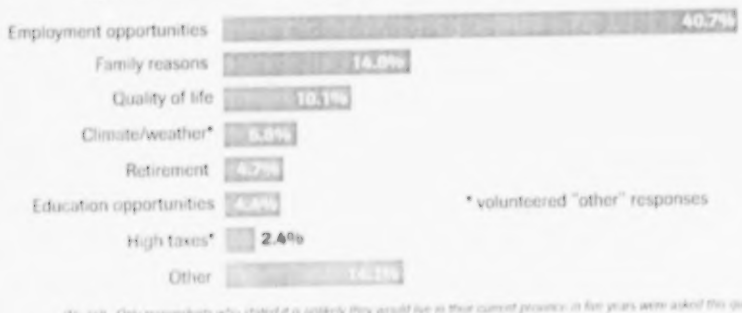


(N=343. Only respondents who stated it is unlikely they would live in their current province in five years were asked this question.)

Western Canadians attribute lower Aboriginal labour force participation to insufficent education and training; divided on solution

Figure 32:
Reason for lower Aboriginal employment levels (West as a whole)

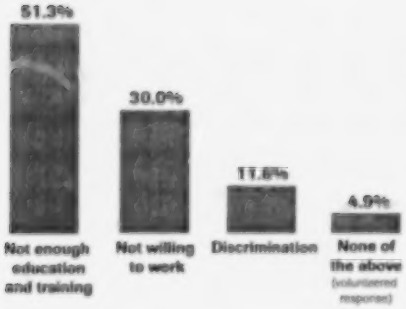
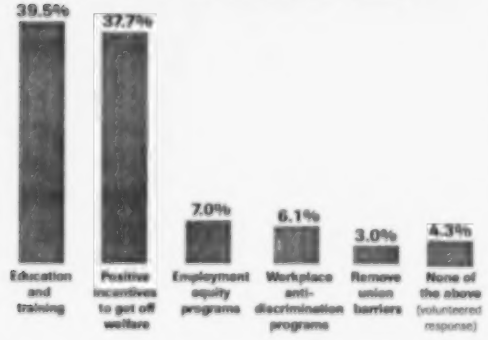


Figure 33:
First priority to increase Aboriginal employment levels (West as a whole)



Western Canada's Aboriginal population presents a tremendous asset to the region. While the non-Aboriginal population is experiencing population aging, the Aboriginal population is relatively young, creating a large potential labour supply for western Canada in the years ahead. The challenge lies in closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employment levels.

The Looking West 2003 survey probed western Canada's perceptions of why Aboriginal employment levels are relatively low, and western Canadians' opinions on how governments should seek to close this gap. To examine perceptions on the cause of lower employment levels, respondents were asked the following question: "Employment levels among Aboriginal people are significantly lower than for other Canadians. Which of the following statements comes closest to your own views: low Aboriginal employment levels are because of discrimination against Aboriginal people; low Aboriginal employment levels are because Aboriginal people do not have the education and training required to get jobs; low Aboriginal employment levels are because Aboriginal people are not willing to work?"

The majority of respondents feel that insufficient education and training is the cause for lower Aboriginal employment levels, while three in ten feel that Aboriginal people are not willing to work. Only one in ten feels that low Aboriginal employment levels are because of discrimination against Aboriginal people. Respondents in Saskatchewan and Alberta are slightly less likely to say that education and training is the issue, and slightly more likely to say lower employment levels are because Aboriginal people are not willing to work, while Manitoba respondents are slightly less likely to say that discrimination is the cause.

There are a number of variations on this question: gender (women are less likely than men to say that Aboriginal people are not willing to work, and more likely than men to say that insufficient education and training is the cause); urban size (CMA residents are less likely to say Aboriginal people are not willing to work); partisanship (NDP voters are much more likely than other voters to say discrimination is the cause, while Liberal voters

are more likely to point to education and training); age (in general, as age increases, respondents are less likely to blame discrimination and more likely to look to education and training); education (respondents with bachelor and graduate/professional degrees are more likely to point to education and training); and income (respondents with annual household incomes less than $30,000 are more likely to state discrimination is the cause, while respondents with annual household incomes of over $150,000 are more likely to state education and training).

To examine opinions on solutions, respondents were asked: "Which of the following should be the first priority of governments to increase Aboriginal employment levels: increasing education and training for Aboriginal people; encouraging workplace anti-discrimination programs; creating positive incentives for Aboriginal people to get off welfare; removing union barriers; enacting employment equity programs?" Respondents are nearly equally divided between "increasing education and training for Aboriginal people" and "creating positive incentives for Aboriginal people to get off welfare." British Columbia respondents are slightly more likely to select education and training solutions (42.8%), while Saskatchewan (45.0%) and Manitoba (45.4%) are more likely to select incentives for Aboriginal people to get off welfare. There are significant urban size variations on this question, with CMA respondents more likely to select education and training and small town respondents more likely to select positive incentives. Partisanship differences are also seen, with Liberal and NDP voters more likely to select education and training, and Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative more likely to select "creating positive incentives for Aboriginal people to get off welfare." Other variations of note include age (respondents aged 70 and over are more likely to select education and training) and education (respondents with a high school diploma or less are more likely to choose positive incentives to get off welfare, while respondents with university degrees are more likely to choose education and training).

ENVIRONMENT

As the recent Kyoto debate demonstrated, environmental issues are an important concern for many Canadians. However, public debate is often presented in terms that juxtapose rather than unite economic and environmental interests, with environmental protection often framed as a constraint on prosperity and economic growth rather than as a fundamental precondition of that prosperity. It is not clear the extent to which western Canadians truly view the balance between economic and environmental interests. In addition, while the Kyoto Accord debate focused on climate change issues, there are other environmental issues – such as land use and water conservation – that also concern western Canada. The Looking West 2003 survey examined attitudes about these three issues – the balance between economic and environmental interests, water conservation, and land use/conservation – and found that western Canadians are quite supportive of environmental values.

Western Canadians strongly believe it is possible to balance economy, environment

To explore perceptions on the balance between environmental and economic interests, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "It is possible for [province] to have both a strong economy and strong environmental protections." This question received the most emphatic response in the survey: over nine in ten western Canadians agree that a strong economy can co-exist with strong environmental protections, and almost two-thirds strongly agree with the statement. Responses are high across all four provinces. Indeed, it is difficult to find meaningful variations on this question; urban or rural, young or old, rich or poor, agreement is high. The main differences to be found are between "strongly" and "somewhat agree": Saskatchewan respondents and respondents aged 70-79 are less likely to strongly agree, and Progressive Conservative voters, NDP voters, and

respondents with over $150,000 annual household income are more likely to strongly agree.

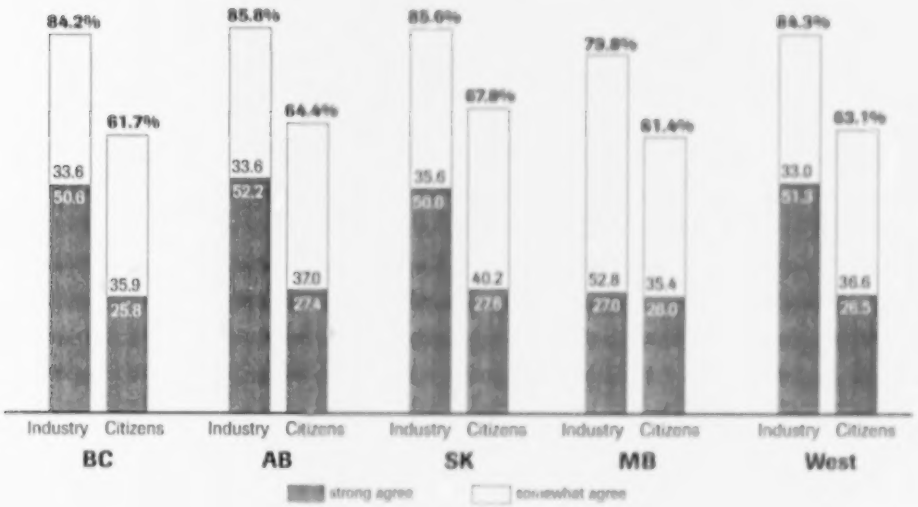
Western Canadians open to increasing water fees to promote water conservation

International trends indicate that water conservation will be a key environmental issue in the years ahead, even for "water-rich" countries such as Canada. One important factor in water conservation is usage patterns; many analysts argue that water conservation could be promoted if water users were made to pay the full cost of water rather than receiving water at a subsidized rate. To examine western Canadian openness to such an approach to water conservation, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with two statements: "To conserve water resources, governments should charge industries the full cost of the water they use" and "To conserve water resources, governments should charge citizens the full cost of the water they use." (Respondents were not asked about agricultural water use.)

While respondents are favorable to both options, it is noteworthy that the idea of increasing water fees to industries receives more support than does the idea of increasing water fees to citizens. Eight in ten western Canadians agree with charging industries the full costs, with five in ten western Canadians strongly agreeing. In contrast, six in ten agree with charging citizens the full costs, with only one in four strongly agreeing. In both instances, Manitoba and British Columbia have slightly lower levels of support for charging full water costs.

As with the first environmental question, variations are small on the industrial water fees question: CMA residents are slightly more supportive, while 18-29 year olds, 70-79 year olds, respondents with less than high school diplomas and respondents with annual household incomes less than $15,000 are less supportive. Few variations are also found on the citizen water fees question: respondents aged 18-29, respondents with less than a high school diploma, and respondents with annual household incomes

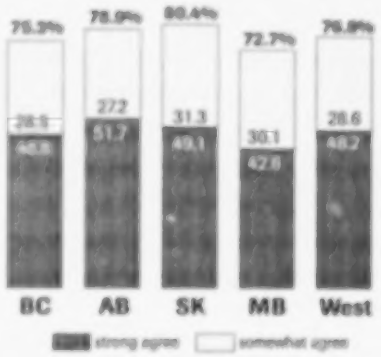
Figure 34: **Agree governments should charge full water costs to industry, citizens**



lower than $15,000 or higher than $150,000 are less supportive, while respondents with annual household incomes of $90,000 - $149,999 and respondents with a bachelor or graduate/professional degree are more supportive.

A third water question, designed to tap into perceptions of water quality, was also included on the survey. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "I am confident that the drinking water in my area is safe." Overall, confidence levels in drinking water quality are high, with three-quarters of respondents agreeing, and almost one-half strongly agreeing. As one might expect, there are some variations relating to urban size, but the differences are not great: 80.2% of CMA residents agree, compared to 72.1% of medium-sized city residents, 76.3% of small town residents, and 71.7% of rural residents. Other variations of note include gender (men are more likely than women to agree), income (in general, as income increases, agreement increases), age (in general, as age increases, agreement increases), and partisanship (federal Canadian Alliance voters are more likely to agree, and NDP voters less likely).

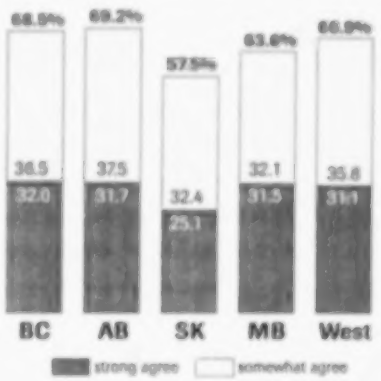
Figure 35:
Agree drinking water safe



Western Canadians feel urban sprawl should be reduced

Urbanization - particularly urbanization in larger city-regions - can place considerable pressures on land use in a province. Internationally, there are growing arguments for urban areas to reduce sprawl and to promote increased urban density. To explore public opinion on this issue, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "As [province]'s cities grow in population, efforts should be made to reduce urban sprawl." As with the other environmental questions, agreement is relatively high, with two-thirds of western Canadians agreeing, and one-third strongly agreeing. Alberta respondents have slightly higher agreement - perhaps reflecting strong urbanization trends experienced by the province in recent years - while Saskatchewan respondents have lower agreement. Respondents' opinions do not vary greatly with urban size. Indeed, and as with the other environmental questions, significant variations are few: partisanship (Liberal and NDP voters are somewhat more likely to agree) and age (respondents aged 50-59 years are more likely to agree, and respondents aged 80 and over less likely to agree).

Figure 36:
Agree urban sprawl should be reduced



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Water conservation: open to increasing water fees to promote conservation?

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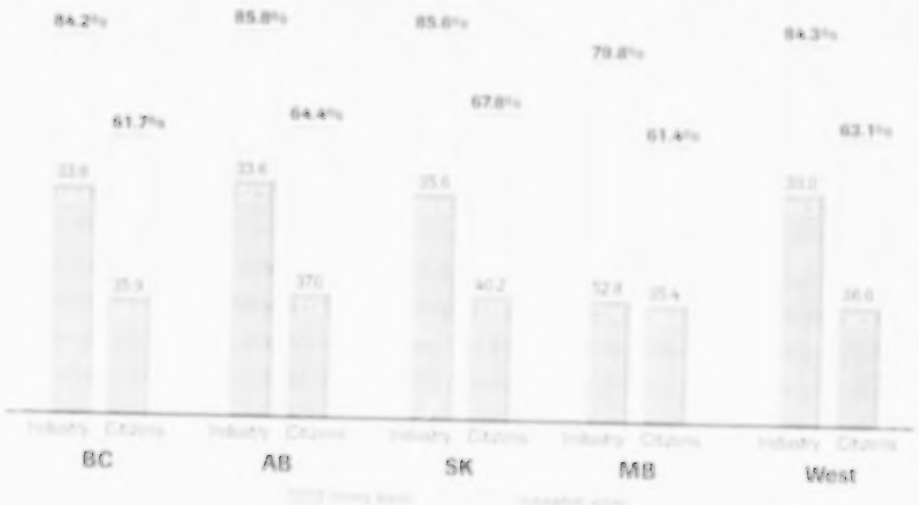

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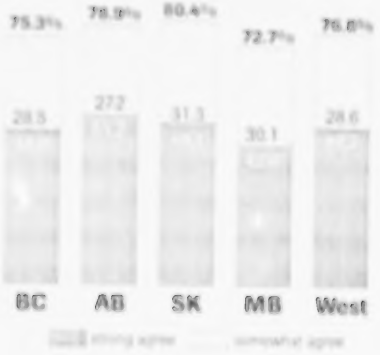


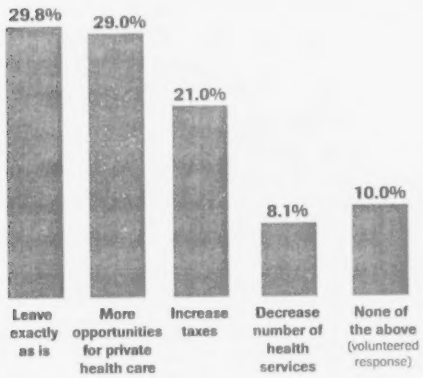
Urbanization – particularly urbanization in larger city-regions – can place considerable pressures on land use in a province. Internationally, there are growing arguments for urban areas to reduce sprawl and to promote increased urban density. To explore public opinion on this issue, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "As [province]'s cities grow in population, efforts should be made to reduce urban sprawl." As with the other environmental questions, agreement is relatively high, with two-thirds of western Canadians agreeing, and one-third strongly agreeing. Alberta respondents have slightly higher agreement – perhaps reflecting strong urbanization trends experienced by the province in recent years – while Saskatchewan respondents have lower agreement. Respondents' opinions do not vary greatly with urban size. Indeed, and as with the other environmental questions, significant variations are few: partisanship (Liberal and NDP voters are somewhat more likely to agree); and age (respondents aged 50-59 years are more likely to agree, and respondents aged 60 and over less likely to agree).

Figure 36
Agree urban sprawl should be reduced

HEALTH CARE

Health care is seen by politicians and the public alike as the most pressing policy issue facing Canada, and many analysts argue that health care costs in the years ahead will grow significantly. This has lead to numerous debates on how to rethink the funding of the system, and there is no shortage of ideas for how the system may be changed to ensure that it is sustainable. Common ideas that emerge include allowing private health care, reducing the services covered, and increasing taxes to cover growing costs. The Looking West 2003 survey considers western Canadian opinion on these options.

Figure 37:
Best approach to health care (West as a whole)



Western Canadians divided on health care solution

To explore western Canadian attitudes to a number of the options that are often debated, respondents were asked, "Canada has had an extensive debate about health care reform. Which of the following options do you feel presents the best approach for our health care system: increase taxes to provide more financial support for public health care; create more opportunities for privately delivered health care; decrease the number of health services that are covered under public health care; leave the health care system exactly as it is right now." None of the options provided receives a majority of support; indeed, the division of responses indicates why health care debates in Canada are so challenging. A near equal number of respondents support increasing opportunities for privately delivered health care as support leaving the system exactly as it is, and a healthy number of respondents support increasing taxes to fund the system. Less than one in ten support decreasing the number of services covered under public health care. One provincial variation of note is found in Saskatchewan, where respondents are less supportive of creating more opportunities for privately delivered health care.

Other variations include urban size (rural respondents are more supportive of private delivery), partisanship (NDP voters are much more supportive of increasing taxes to fund the system, while Canadian Alliance voters are much less supportive of this option; the reverse pattern is seen with respect to support for private health care); age (compared to other age categories, respondents aged 70 and over are less supportive of private health care, while 18-29 year olds are more supportive of increased

taxes); education (respondents with less than a high school diploma are less supportive of both increased taxes and private delivery); and income (respondents with annual household incomes above $150,000 are less supportive of increased taxes, while support for private health care increases with income).

WESTERN CANADA: MYTHS AND REALITIES

In popular debate and in political rhetoric, people attempt to explain western Canada in many different ways. Many argue that the West is not a region, or that British Columbia attitudinally stands apart from the three prairie provinces. It is often argued that there are two Wests, urban and rural. And it is often suggested that western alienation is not a real phenomena, or that it is based on partisanship rather than region-wide sentiment. The Looking West 2003 survey tests these assumptions and points to a western reality that is much more nuanced and subtle than hasty explanations suggest.

Is western alienation real?

There is no doubt that western Canadians express considerable regional discontent. While it is beyond the scope of the Looking West survey to comment on how western discontent compares to discontent in Atlantic Canada, Quebec and the North, it is possible to say that regional discontent in western Canada is not dropping. Indeed, in Manitoba, typically the least "alienated" of the four western provinces, discontent is actually increasing, as is discontent in Alberta.

Discontent does vary with partisanship, with Canadian Alliance voters expressing the greatest discontent (harkening back to their Reform Party "the West wants in" roots). However, as in the 2001 survey, partisan differences are differences of degree, and Liberal and NDP voters also register high levels of discontent. Discontent also varies with a number of demographic variables: women, young people, and CMA residents often report lower levels of discontent, although again these are differences of degree. The point to stress, as in 2001, is that regional discontent is pervasive in western Canada. To dismiss discontent as simply partisanship, a rural issue, or an age or gender issue would be incorrect.

Is there an urban-rural divide in western Canada?

Are there two separate Wests, urban and rural? Do respondents living in large cities (CMAs) hold significantly different views from respondents living in medium-sized cities, small towns or rural areas? In a word, no. In terms of regional discontent, as noted earlier, CMA residents report slightly lower levels of discontent, and on a number of questions, discontent is higher in rural areas and small towns than in the urban areas. However, the differences are rarely large, and on many questions significant differences do not exist. In terms of policy priorities, urban size differences are seen with respect to the prioritization of rural and urban issues, immigration and retaining young people, but on most other issues there is only a 5% (or less) gap in opinion. Indeed, on many issues, the attitudes of CMA and rural respondents have the greatest congruence. For example, under 40% of respondents in CMA and rural areas rate "lowering taxes" as a high priority, compared to almost 50% of respondents in medium-sized cities and small towns.

Some differences are noted with respect to urban and rural issues. There are also urban size variations on a few other questions, including mobility and Aboriginal employment. But overall, these are variations of degree. Indeed, the relative homogeneity of responses is notable.

Does British Columbia stand apart from the three prairie provinces?

In many ways, British Columbia is unique from the other three western provinces. It is unique in geography, with its coast and arid interior, in its economy, with its forestry and fishery industries, and in its population, with its higher immigrant and lower Aboriginal populations. However, in terms of public opinion, British Columbia is highly similar to the rest of the West. This is true in terms of regional discontent, policy priority, and the specific policy issues (including environmental issues).

How sharp are federal partisanship differences in western Canada?

In reviewing the survey data, one thing becomes quite clear: Canadian Alliance and NDP voters do not see the policy world in the same way. This is not a surprise, of course, but the partisanship differences are often the main points of heterogeneity in the entire survey. It is interesting to look at the responses of Progressive Conservative voters. On many issues, particularly those relating to economics, Progressive Conservative and Canadian Alliance voters share similar positions. But on myriad other issues, Progressive Conservative voters are closer in opinion to the Liberal voters, and in some cases to the NDP voters. Indeed, a strong pattern is difficult to discern. And Liberal voters more often than not hold down the middle of public opinion – as one might predict. But again, with the exception of some Canadian Alliance – NDP gaps, partisanship differences are typically differences of degree, with voters for one federal party somewhat more likely to select a given response than are voters from another party.

CONCLUSION: HETEROGENEOUS PROVINCES, HOMOGENEOUS OPINIONS

The most striking thing from the survey data is the degree to which respondents in the four western provinces see their political and policy worlds in a similar light. Residents in all four provinces express regional discontent, concern for the environment, and strong interest in retaining their province's young people. Residents in all four provinces support the ideas of dedicated fuel taxes and infrastructure bonds, the sharing of federal and provincial tax revenues with local governments, and using water pricing to promote conservation. And with the exception of water pricing, residents in all four provinces are highly resistant to financing ideas that relate to user fees. These are just a few of the areas where the West shows high degrees of similarity. Overall, the policy opinion coherence across the West is similar to the policy coherence within individual western provinces.

This relative homogeneity in opinion presents an opportunity for the western provinces. As the Looking West 2003 survey demonstrates, there is considerable public support for increased regional cooperation, both in terms of national debates and in terms of provincial policy-making. The similarities in opinion among the provinces suggest a foundation on which to build greater regional cooperation. The differences that do exist are not a significant obstacle to either interprovincial cooperation or to articulating a regional perspective on national policy debates. It will be interesting to see in the years ahead if the western Canadian provinces take advantage of this opportunity.

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